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Implementation of the international work programme on education, public awareness and training

Report of the Secretary-General

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Introduction

1. At its fourth session in 1996, the Commission on Sustainable Development initiated a work programme for the implementation of chapter 36 of Agenda 21[1] on "Education, public awareness and training".[2] An expanded version of this work programme was adopted by the Commission at its sixth session in 1998.[3] The table provided in the annex summarizes this work programme, which consists of 7 subprogrammes and 23 tasks. The Secretary-General was asked to report on the implementation of the work programme at the seventh session of the Commission. The present report was prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as task manager. Inputs were provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Earth Council and non-governmental organizations in Poland and Zimbabwe. Taking into account the very short reporting period, emphasis has been placed on those initiatives that have set in motion work in the longer term, and that have the potential of mobilizing the various actors cited by the Commission. The very existence of such an international work programme has had a significant impact in and of itself. It demonstrates that the international community and particularly Governments remain convinced that education is indeed indispensable for attaining sustainable development. It serves as a useful instrument for mobilizing action with respect to working towards commonly held objectives, for setting priorities and for identifying key actors.

I. Progress in implementing the work programme

A. Clarifying and communicating the concept and key messages of education for sustainable development

2. Since the launching of the work programme in 1996, much progress has been made in advancing the new vision of education, public awareness and training as key instruments for achieving sustainable development. UNESCO as task manager has given highest priority until now to clarifying the concept in a collective way, principally through the preparation of the document *Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action*[4] in which the whole of the United Nations system, the World Bank, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Organization of American States (OAS) and others participated. This document, translated by UNESCO into all the official languages of the United Nations, has been very well received within countries. Several countries have taken the initiative to reproduce and distribute it widely and/or to translate it into non-United Nations languages. The International Conference on Environment and Society: Education and Public Awareness for Sustainability organized by UNESCO and the Government of Greece in December 1997 also contributed to the discussion of the concept particularly within the environmental education community (see E/CN.17/1998/19). The proceedings of the conference were published in late 1998 in both printed and compact disk read-only memory (CD-ROM) formats, available upon request.

3. Experience thus far suggests that some confusion about the concept persists, so that even when the same terms are used, different meanings are often attributed to them. This

is not surprising, since the concept seeks to integrate so many streams that had previously been seen as separate. The following misconceptions still prevail, namely, that:

(a) Education **about** sustainable development is the same as education **for** sustainable development. In fact, the former concerns transmitting information about various principles and issues of sustainable development; and the latter — which lies at the heart of Agenda 21 — concerns the role of education, public awareness and training as key instruments in attaining sustainable development. Education **for** sustainable development is an integral part of promoting social and economic development, alleviating poverty, managing the use of natural resources, promoting sustainable consumption and production, controlling population growth, and so forth;

(b) Sustainable development is mostly about the environment, and therefore "education for sustainable development" is simply a new twist to the notion of "environmental education". In fact, environment is only one component encompassed by this broad concept;

(c) Education is the concern only of education ministries and the educational community. In fact, education from the perspective of sustainability implicates all sectors of society as both actors and beneficiaries;

(d) Education is limited to formal education of children. In fact, education is now seen as a lifelong process which can be formal or non-formal at all levels and for people of all ages.

4. To address the aforementioned misconceptions, UNESCO, in concert with its partners, is continuing its efforts to clarify the concept and key messages of education for sustainable development, and to introduce this new thinking as widely as possible, through publications, conferences, participation in meetings and other channels.

B. Reviewing national education policies and reorienting formal educational systems

5. This part of the work programme is the key to the reform of formal educational systems which is seen as necessary by Governments throughout the world.

1. Development of national educational policies and strategies

6. At its sixth session, the Commission on Sustainable Development called upon Governments and others concerned with such reform to ensure that the perspective of sustainable development was a driving force within the process of reform. Governments were urged to develop, within five years, policy statements for reorienting education towards sustainable development, including a definition of what needs to be done at the local, national and regional levels, so that all actors will understand their respective roles and responsibilities. The main impediments remain: (a) lack of adequate financing for education, (b) lack of concrete political commitment to match the importance attributed to the educational enterprise and (c) sectoralization of school systems, curricula and public bodies responsible for educational policy, management and financing.

7. To assist Governments with this process, UNESCO launched in 1998 a special initiative to foster inter-agency cooperation and joint action at national level within its transdisciplinary project "Educating for a Sustainable Future". This initiative, which includes working closely with the United Nations resident coordinators, is intended to provide a framework for concerted action for United Nations bodies, other international

and regional institutions, international and regional funding bodies, government ministries, the educational community and non-governmental organizations. The goal is to coordinate and, when appropriate, integrate efforts in the education sphere within a given country. In 1998–1999, this initiative is being tested on a pilot basis in a few countries, including Brazil, Egypt and the Dominican Republic.

8. The Education for All Assessment 2000 for basic education, being conducted by UNESCO and its partners within the follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand, 5–9 March 1990, should provide insight to countries for the review of national policies and the reform of educational systems. Five regional meetings will be held in 1999, and a global conference will be held in Brazil in 2000. Also of relevance are the follow-up to the UNESCO Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (Hamburg, July 1997), and the Second UNESCO International Congress on Technical and Vocational Training, being organized in Seoul with the Government of the Republic of Korea for June 1999, as well as the follow-up to the report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, headed by Jacques Delors.[5]

2. Reorientation of teacher education

9. At its sixth session, the Commission on Sustainable Development urged Governments to ensure that within five years measures are taken to engage the approximately 60 million teachers worldwide in the process of reform. As requested by the Commission, UNESCO is developing guidelines for reorienting teacher education towards sustainable development. A pilot network of teacher education institutions has been established to assist this process, based on research and experimentation in reorienting their own programmes. York University (Canada) is creating a new UNESCO Chair in Reorienting Teacher Training Towards Sustainable Development to facilitate the work of this network. UNESCO is also preparing an extensive Self-Study Programme for Teachers on Sustainability which will be available on the Internet and in Internet-compatible CD-ROM format in mid-1999, targeted to individual teachers or groups of teachers. Education International, representing 23 million teachers worldwide, adopted a far-reaching resolution on sustainable development at its Second World Congress held in Washington in July 1998.

3. Reform of higher education

10. The Commission on Sustainable Development has emphasized that institutions of higher education need to promote an interdisciplinary perspective conducive to addressing sustainable development issues in both teaching and research. This topic was taken up at a special session held during the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, October 1998), in collaboration with the United Nations University (UNU) and the International Association of Universities. The declaration and action plan of the conference stress the importance of sustainable development. Some 30 UNESCO Chairs for Sustainable Development have been established in universities around the world. The proceedings of a World Bank-UNESCO meeting on Organizing Knowledge for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (October 1997) were published in April 1998 and diffused widely by both institutions.

C. Incorporating education into strategies and action plans for sustainable development

11. Education, public awareness and training need to be integral components in regional, national and local strategies and plans. A survey of existing regional and national strategies and plans has been undertaken by UNESCO, in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP, to determine the extent to which education has been adequately addressed. The survey will be published in 1999, and will include an analysis of the scope and quality of the information available. A preliminary conclusion is that countries seem to be reporting on education according to different interpretations of what is meant by "education for sustainable development", reflecting the confusion about the concept mentioned above. Through its Capacity 21 programme, UNDP works in 70 developing countries to build capacity for integration of Agenda 21 principles into national action plans. IUCN, the World Resources Institute and numerous other non-governmental organizations, as well as the educational community, have also been active in pressing for inclusion of education into strategies and plans.

12. The Second Summit of the Americas (Chile, April 1998) strongly emphasized that education lies at the centre of the development process. A document entitled "Education for a Sustainable Future in the Americas", prepared jointly by UNESCO and OAS with experts from the region, was presented to the meeting of Ministers of Education of the Americas (Brazil, July 1998). The Ministers passed a resolution supporting education for sustainable development and approved the Inter-American Programme for Education which includes a new Multinational Project on Education for Citizenship and Sustainability in Multi-Cultural Societies.

D. Educating to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns

13. The Commission on Sustainable Development has recognized the critical role of education in promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns. This field is still in its infancy. Much work needs to be done to define parameters and priorities for action. Again, clarity of the concept needs to be established, including making a distinction between education **about** and education **for**, with the ultimate concern being to change values and lifestyles. Initial discussion of this topic was included in the chapter on sustainable consumption within the document "Educating for a Sustainable Future" prepared by UNESCO. A special session on sustainable lifestyles was held during the Thessaloniki Conference in December 1997, the proceedings of which encompass the seven papers presented on this subject.

14. Further progress was made in September 1998 at an OECD workshop on "Education and Learning for Sustainable Consumption". UNEP is organizing an International Experts Meeting on Advertising and Sustainable Consumption in January 1999. UNESCO is conducting a pilot programme in Brazil for small and medium-sized businesses. A book will be published in mid-1999 summarizing the 30 best practices emerging from this programme, which has provided more than 6,000 people with 40 hours of training.

E. Promoting investments in education

15. Investment is a critical means for unleashing the full force of education in helping to bring about sustainable development. An analysis and understanding are needed of (a) the extent to which current investments meet the needs of a country, and (b) whether current investments in education take into account the new vision of education as a tool for achieving overarching political, social and economic objectives. The international and regional financial institutions are already investing in education, usually as a component of more comprehensive loans or aid packages. Private sector investments, including in training programmes, also need to be reviewed from this perspective. Governments and the international community need also to take into account the serious impact that the Asian and other economic crises have had on basic education, particularly in rural areas. The ultimate challenge for all parties concerned with education is to coordinate investments from various sources at national level into a coherent overall effort that will assist countries in moving forward as quickly and effectively as possible.

F. Identifying and sharing innovative practices

16. As requested by the Commission on Sustainable Development, UNESCO has continued to develop the International Registry of Innovative Practices Promoting Education, Public Awareness and Training for Sustainability, in cooperation with the Government of the United States of America, Environment-Canada and the Canadian Man and the Biosphere Programme. The registry will provide a clearing house mechanism consisting of nodes developed with a common protocol. Since the sixth session of the Commission, a functioning prototype of the system has been developed, consisting of a revised international site and a demonstration national node, and mock-ups of regional and institutional nodes. A workshop on developing a Canadian national node within the registry will be held in January 1999. Thereafter, the system will be pilot-tested in a few countries with varying levels of development and different cultures. Full implementation of the system is foreseen in late 1999, when a "tool kit" will be made available to potential users by UNESCO.

G. Raising public awareness

17. Although a separate subprogramme was created for public awareness, this area of concern is also covered by other subprogrammes. The emphasis is on information campaigns to enable the public to understand the principles of sustainable development and the stakes for the future. Efforts have been focused on implementing the articles concerning education within the Convention on Biological Diversity,[6] the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[7] and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa,[8] and on creating synergies among these conventions. Since the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, UNESCO, UNEP and IUCN as well as the secretariats of the conventions have begun a number of initiatives along these lines, targeted to specific countries or regions or to specific groups or sectors of society. It is hoped that the International Registry mentioned above will serve to give a clearer picture of what is happening and to highlight examples of particular interest.

II. Integrated follow-up to United Nations conferences and conventions

18. The Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session set the implementation of the work programme squarely within the context of the integrated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences of the 1990s and the post-Rio conventions. UNESCO will publish in early 1999 a detailed analysis and synthesis of all of these action plans and conventions, from which common themes and priorities with respect to education clearly emerge. While linkages are clear among the action plans and conventions, there are many impediments to creating linkages in terms of action and monitoring. The report will also address these issues. The UNESCO inter-agency initiative mentioned above is intended to provide a framework for integrated follow-up at national level.

III. Strategic issues concerning implementation of the work programme

19. In reviewing the implementation of the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme and in discussing prospects for progress in the future, it is useful to keep in mind certain strategic issues that have emerged from experience acquired thus far.

20. Education for sustainable development is above all about changing values, behaviour and lifestyles. These kinds of qualitative changes do not lend themselves easily to monitoring in concrete and/or quantitative terms. The cultural dimension adds to this complexity.

21. The attainment of the changes sought (changing lifestyles, reforming educational systems, revamping curricula) requires a period of perhaps 20 years or more. The immediate task is to set in motion a process of change that in most countries is likely to be incremental over time.

22. The content of education is, in effect, a mirror of society: its values, goals and priorities. Education for a sustainable future must therefore mirror the image of the kind of society to which we aspire. In the final analysis, in order for education to change, society must change.

23. It is clear that, as reflected in the decision of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session, the main responsibility for education, and therefore for the work programme, lies with Governments and other actors at the national and local levels. The main role of the international community is to facilitate such change. At the heart, therefor, of the successful implementation of the work programme is the necessary political commitment and will to bring about real change in countries. Similarly, there needs to be continuity of action over a period of time long enough to allow such a complex and difficult process to unfold.

24. While Governments have underlined the importance they attach to education in general and to the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme in particular, no new resources have been made available for implementation.

IV. Other steps taken by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to promote the work programme

25. UNESCO as task manager has taken a number of steps to publicize the work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development. A page on the UNESCO Web site is being created for this purpose. A brochure is also being prepared. UNESCO is contacting all Governments and relevant actors within the international community to draw attention to the work programme and encourage its implementation and partnership.

26. By decision of its General Conference in late 1997, UNESCO fully integrated the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme within the Organization's programme and budget. Responsibility within UNESCO lies with the Transdisciplinary Project: Educating for a Sustainable Future, created in 1994 as an experimental, cross-sectoral unit mandated to mobilize the whole of the Organization towards education for sustainable development, in the framework of the integrated follow-up to the United Nations conferences and conventions. Therefore UNESCO's entire education, science, culture and communication programmes contribute to the implementation of the Commission's work programme.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 8* (E/1996/28), chap. I, sect. C, decision 4/11.

[3] Ibid., *1998, Supplement No. 9* (E/1998/29), chap. I, sect. B, decision 6/3, sect. C.

[4] Paris, UNESCO, November 1997 (EPD-97/CONF.401/CLD.1).

[5] *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Paris, UNESCO, 1996).

[6] See United Nations Environment Programme, *Convention on Biological Diversity* (Environmental Law and Institution Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[7] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

[8] A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II.

Annex

Work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development: education, public awareness and training for sustainability

Priority areas for action		*Tasks*	*Key actors cited by the Commission on Sustainable Development*
A. Clarify and communicate the concept and key messages of education for sustainable development	A.1	Implement chapter 36 and the Commission on Sustainable Development work programme as part of integrated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and conventions	UNESCO, other United Nations bodies, Governments, major groups
	A.2	Continue to clarify and communicate concept and key messages, with emphasis on regional and national levels	UNESCO
B. Review national education policies and reorient formal educational systems	B.1	Develop policies and strategies for reorienting formal education towards sustainable development	Governments at all levels
	B.2	Include sustainable development objectives in curricula	Governments at all levels
	B.3	Develop guidelines for the reorientation of teacher training	UNESCO
	B.4	Reorient teacher training	Governments
	B.5	Introduce an interdisciplinary approach in teaching and research	Institutions of higher education
	B.6	Give due consideration to how the reform of higher education may support sustainable development	Participants at the conference (October 1998), UNESCO
C. Incorporate education into national strategies and action plans for sustainable development	C.1	Make education and public awareness significant components in regional, national and local strategies and action plans for sustainable development	Governments
	C.2	Complete the survey of existing regional and national strategies and action plans	UNESCO, with UNDP, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat
	C.3	Integrate education at all levels into national and local strategies	Governments at all levels
	C.4	Integrate the aspect of gender balance and empowerment of women into national education strategies	Governments

Priority areas for action	*Tasks*	*Key actors cited by the Commission on Sustainable Development*
D. Educate to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns in all countries	D 1 Raise awareness of relation to sustainability of current patterns of consumption and production, use educational tools and consumer feedback for policy-making, develop and promote social instruments, continue to work on indicators	Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, UNESCO, UNEP, OECD
	D 2 Collect best practices in media and advertising	World Business Council for Sustainable Development, International Chamber of Commerce, trade unions, civil society
	D 3 Report to the Commission at its seventh session on progress made	Secretary-General of the United Nations
E. Promote investments in education	E 1 Consider current levels of financing in education from the perspective of sustainable development	UNDP, World Bank, other international financing institutions
F. Identify and share innovative practices	F 1 Continue work on the international electronic registry	UNESCO
	F 2 Develop and strengthen international and regional alliances, associations, networks among educational and training institutions and professional bodies	Not specified
	F 3 Strengthen networks and partnerships	Governments
	F 4 Recognize and use traditional knowledge	Not specified
G. Raise public awareness	G 1 Develop capacities for raising public awareness and access to information	Governments